

## Home schooling as an open-learning educational challenge in South Africa

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*Despite current legislation which makes provision for collaboration between the public school sector and home schooling, it appears that much can still be done to move towards a closer partnership. Consequently I investigated the possibilities of such a liaison. A literature review on the nature of home schooling in general was conducted as background to a qualitative investigation on the views of parents, educators and other role players of home schooling within the South African context. The findings showed that home schooling was an open learning educational system which provided opportunities to those learners who wished to participate, irrespective of the possible disadvantages. In conclusion it was found that co-operation between the education authorities and home schoolers was in the best interests of the individual's right to learn, and a symbiotic relationship between the two could benefit both of them.*

### Introduction

According to the White Paper on Education and Training (RSA, 1995:21-22) there are 23 values and principles that form a framework for a new system of education and training in South Africa. These values include, among other things, the fact that parents and guardians have the primary responsibility for the education of their children and the fact that education and training are basic human rights. The state has an obligation to protect and advance these rights (Mda & Mothata, 2000:69) which include the right of the best possible educational opportunities.

Historically, open learning was developed to create more educational opportunities to address the diverse learning needs of learners and according to Willis (1993:8-9) this concept is gaining in popularity and numerous private schools worldwide offer open-learning courses. A fresh culture of learning — one that is characterised by an open, flexible learner-centred approach to meet the diverse needs and expectations of learners — is essential for teaching in a changed South Africa. Any approach to teaching needs to utilise a variety of teaching strategies for greater options, so that individual learner's needs and personal circumstances can be accommodated (Phatudi, 1997:2; SAIDE, 1995:47). It is important to note that home schooling is one of the options regarded as open learning educational approaches, as it is a learning experience without conventional structures and limitations. In open learning, learners are largely responsible for their own learning, as they themselves decide on what, how, where and when they want to learn (Strydom & Grimsley, 1996:1).

Home schooling is the collaborative term used for referring to the different ways in which learners can be educated at home and it is an approach that is becoming increasingly popular among parents world-wide. This increasing

popularity seems to be due to the fact that instructional media, such as the different forms of information technology, make it more accessible than in the past (Natale, 1995:34). The increasing popularity of home schooling implies that it should be taken into account during the planning for school education. It is difficult to plan for such education because it is difficult to determine the exact number of learners being educated at home, as many parents still practise this covertly for fear of prosecution because it was illegal in the past, although most countries' education legislation has started to provide for home schooling in the last ten years (Mayberry, Knowles, Ray & Marlow, 1995:10-11). In 1987 there were an estimated 12 000 home learners in the USA (Lines, 1987:510) that could be accounted for, but they seemed to have increased to more than a million in the next eight years up to 1995 (Meighan, 1995:275). In that same year Australia had about 20 000 home learners and Canada and the United Kingdom each about 10 000 (Meighan, 1995:275-276). In England and Wales there were between 8 000 and 10 000 home learners in 1995 and in that year almost 100 families were joining a particular home learner's support group per month (Henson, 1996:68). These are all estimated numbers which have increased and, as the tendency shows, could have increased even more in the ten years since 1995. If the exact numbers are even higher they stress the necessity of providing for the needs of such learners.

In South Africa legislation also provides for home schooling (South African Schools Act, 1996:27) and although the exact number of home schoolers is not known because of a large component of unregistered home learners, the estimated number of home learners was approximately 2 000 in 1998 (National Coalition of Home Schoolers, 1998). The Chief Education Specialist (Institution and Research Registration and Independent School Subsidies), of the Department of Education in the Free State, pointed out that 256 home learners were registered in the Free State in January 2005 (2005: interview participant A). These numbers may be much higher because according to Leenderd van Oostrum, founding chairperson of the Association for Home Schooling, many parents do not register because they fear the education authorities. Van Oostrum estimated the number of home learners at between 30 000 and 50 000 in 2003 (Mufweba, 2003:15). The estimated number of home schoolers in South Africa necessitates the needs of these learners being addressed and the fact that the numbers are still increasing justifies an investigation into the particular problems that may arise.

### **Problem statement**

Because open learning refers to a learning process that eliminates certain obstacles in the teaching-learning process (Strydom & Grimsley, 1996:1), home schooling can be regarded as such, but the degree of openness will depend on the way it is implemented (Brynard, 1998:177). Home schooling should never be regarded as a threat to any existing system of education in South Africa, but rather as complementary. Like any past, present or future system it has shortcomings, but, in an interview with a Chief Education

Specialist (Special Needs in Education) of the Free State Department of Education, it was pointed out that the system does offer possible educational solutions in certain circumstances, as well as relief from the pressure on an over-burdened South African education system. The many advantages of the system could be exploited to benefit education. The same official also stated that while home schools had initially moved away from the traditional school system, there were many members who were currently desirous of moving closer together again (2004: interview participant B).

It is essential for all school systems to be directed towards preparing learners for a continuously changing world. South Africa, which is experiencing an inevitable process of transformation, should provide for a more open educational approach with a greater variety of learning systems (SAIDE, 1995:47). It is difficult to plan for this without sufficient information and proper control. It has become necessary to investigate the necessity for closer collaboration between home schooling and the public school system. Against this background the following research questions were accordingly formulated:

- What are the possibilities of home schooling as an open learning educational alternative?
- How can a collaborative approach between home schooling and the public school system meet the demands of a changing South Africa?

### **Research design**

Literature studies on the context, nature and current issues of home schooling in general, as well as a qualitative investigation within the South African context were conducted. The literature provided an international and national perspective on the concept of home schooling as an open learning educational alternative while interviews with 11 different role players, with knowledge of home schooling in South Africa, placed home schooling within the South African context. In order to gain a broad overview of home schooling the initial research for this study involved a comprehensive literature study to determine whether co-operation between home schooling and the public school system could be in the best interest of the individual's right to learn.

#### **Literature**

The literature study was done to corroborate the findings and compare the results with those of previous research studies (Poggenpoel in Olivier, 2003: 109). The literature study was conducted to reveal the development and nature of home schooling internationally as well as locally in order to give an objective opinion of home schooling in South Africa. The sources also included relevant policy and legislation documents.

#### **Qualitative investigation**

Semi-structured interviews were used in this study to gain information about participants' beliefs on home schooling in South Africa. This was done be-

cause, according to Bell (1997:91), the advantage of the interview over the questionnaire is that the researcher can follow up ideas and investigate motives and feelings which a questionnaire cannot.

### *Sampling of participants*

Strydom and De Vos (1998:198) recommend that a sample of role-players who are representative and characteristic of people involved in the object of the research be interviewed. Participants with practical knowledge and experience and who could best answer the research questions were chosen randomly in an attempt to ensure descriptive and informative data (Schurink, 1998:153). These people were well represented in terms of age, gender and qualifications. The researcher participated as the research instrument (Schurink, 1998:259) with limited preconceived ideas or expectations. A total of 11 participants, consisting of learners, parents, teachers, lecturers, psychologists and education department officials were interviewed until theoretical saturation was reached. Although participants were selected through a process of voluntary contribution and availability, a snowball approach was used in this regard.

### *Data collection*

The interviews were conducted over a period of time and the emphasis was upon gaining the participants' perspectives and experiences on home schooling. Observations were made which led to the questions, which were structured but open enough to follow unexpected leads, as Glesne and Peshkin (1992:92) suggest. Information was gained from individual learners, parents and educationalists that had different views on home schooling. In some cases it was necessary to interview participants again, especially when new perspectives were raised by the subsequent participants. The duration of the interviews ranged from 30–60 minutes.

The researcher allowed themes to emerge through the general research questions before following a specific line of inquiry. Interviews were conducted and participants were observed in their learning environment. Reflective field notes and audiotapes were used (Olivier, 2003:108). The participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. For the purpose of confidentiality participants were referred to as participants A to K.

### *Data analysis*

After transcribing the audiotapes of the interviews the information was analysed to increase understanding of it and to be able to present the findings (Niemann, 2005:16). Coding by means of bracketing took place until prominent themes could be identified and described. The researcher needed to create order in the data when they had been collected. In order to do this, Glesne and Peshkin (1992:127) suggest that the researcher should search for patterns, integrate data and synthesise information. Critical inquiry and reflection were a continuous part of the research process (Moore, 2004:97).

*Achieving reliability and validity*

The qualitative investigation attempted to represent the reality without random errors and as accurately and authentically as possible. Prominent qualitative researchers such as Smaling (1994:78) regard reliability as the elimination of casual errors that can influence the results. He also regards the sense of absence of random errors as an aspect of methodological objectivity because avoidance of distortions is included in objectivity. Guba and Lincoln (1982:241-243), who can be regarded as pioneers of qualitative research, refer to Guba's model for qualitative research, which was applied, to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings. Participants rapidly became accustomed to the researcher and continued as they would have done had she not been there. The researcher's own observations and the contrasting and comparison of data served as a confirmation of the validity of the data, although generalisation needed to be ascertained through the application of verification studies (Moore, 2004:101).

The study affected the researcher in a positive way. The researcher's attitude changed through exposure to the research. There were many insights that the researcher gained due to deeper understanding of the participants' views and their expertise on home schooling.

*Ethical issues*

Because of the sensitivity of the topic, care was taken to adhere to ethical measures such as secrecy of the participants' identity during the research (Miles & Huberman, 1996:290; Niemann, 2005:16). The topic was sensitive because many home learners were subjected to scrutiny from fellow members of the community and there were parents who practised home schooling without the permission of the authorities (Moore, 2004:98).

**Research purpose**

The research was conducted in two phases, the first being an exploration of a comprehensive situation analysis of home schools internationally and in South Africa. The second was an attempt to investigate the possibilities of an education model for South Africa that met the demands of our times by allowing all stakeholders more freedom to select the educational opportunities of their choice.

**Results**

Situation analysis of home schooling: internationally and locally

Home schooling moves away from the traditional concept of children attending a school. Before investigating the reasons it had to be determined how and why traditional and home schooling originated because home schooling seems to have been the inception of the traditional school system.

*Historical perspective on classroom teaching*

Traditional school education originated with man's search for knowledge, the

information explosion and the resultant development of the human race. This directly brought about the current teaching situation as documented a number of years ago by educationalists such as Van der Stoep & Van Dyk (1980: 2). In the 1970s Pistorius (1970:26) remarked that in primitive societies parents were responsible for their children's education, instinctively conveying practical aspects like customs, traditions and basic skills. Such instinctive education survived even when societies became more developed and labour more divided.

One of the first educationists who described the origin of modern day schools was Graves (1937:241; 295), who wrote that the early Christians regarded the care and education of children as the primary responsibility of parents. Monastic schools were influential prior to and during the Middle Ages until a more formal learning programme was developed. During the Industrial Revolution in the late nineteenth century the state took over the responsibility for formal education and training and established schools. The children of parents who worked in factories were thus kept off the streets and simultaneously taught to read and write. Schools moreover prevented children from being used as cheap labour. By the end of the Industrial Revolution state schools were common and school attendance became compulsory in most countries (Brynard, 1998:180).

In the USA, the first legislation compelling children to attend public schools was the Massachusetts School Attendance Act of 1852, which stipulated that children between eight and 14 years of age were compelled to attend school for a minimum of 12 weeks per year. Other states followed, and by 1918 most American states accepted a policy of compulsory school attendance (Whitehead & Crow, 1993:114).

The historical educationist, Pistorius (1970:262-326), states that in South Africa in 1652, Jan van Riebeeck's refreshment station paid scant attention to education matters, so that parents had to handle the education of their children themselves. In 1663 the first proper school, attached to the church, was founded. As there were no trained teachers available, parents and sometimes a religious minister or medical official took charge of teaching. At the out-posts education was left entirely to parents, eventually assisted by itinerant tutors. The so-called Jan Smuts Act of 1907 made school attendance for children between seven and 14 years compulsory; in 1916 the age was increased to 15 years or Standard 5.

It is clear that home schooling was fundamental to civilisation as the only form of education for many years. Parents had a unique right to and responsibility for their children's education. Once state schools were established in the late nineteenth century, they took over the parents' unique position. But, as the inadequacies and shortcomings of education systems gradually became obvious, parents increasingly began re-claiming their rights as primary educators. For this reason home schooling again started to gain momentum in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

*The development of contemporary home schooling*

In order to understand why parents wish to implement home schooling, one should understand the nature of this type of instruction. Unlike traditional school instruction, home schooling is not a system designed by one group of people and implemented by another. Home schooling in its primary sense implies that parents are responsible for both the planning and implementation of the instruction. Home schooling therefore forms an integral part of a family's daily activities as most of these parents regard their influence on their children's education as part of their primary task as educators (Mayberry, Knowles, Ray & Marlow, 1995:10-11).

The development of instructional technology, such as the internet and various home schooling computer programs, have contributed to the tendency for parents themselves to provide their children's education, by making it easier for parents and more interesting for learners. The development of the internet has also helped learners to make contact with other learners and instructional systems world-wide (Natale, 1995:34).

Research by Mayberry *et al.* (1995:2) showed that there are no apparent reasons why parents cannot teach their own children, because their social environment, motivation, the family and the home exert a far greater influence on learners' education success than the teacher or the curriculum in a traditional school. The research of Brynard (1998:184) also showed that most parents are capable of facilitating the education of their children over both the short and the long term

*Home schooling: as education alternative*

There seem to be a number of reasons why parents prefer home schooling although Van Oostrum (1995:2) states that parents' most frequent reasons for preferring home schooling can be traced to a general dissatisfaction with public school education internationally. Van Oostrum goes further to state that universally people show a tendency to distrust state structures. Individuals are therefore increasingly taking responsibility for their own lives and hence also for the education of their children. The most frequently given reasons why parents teach their children at home seem to be:

- Religious convictions within the school system

The majority of parents who turn to home schooling because of the problems they have with the current school system, do so for religious reasons (Cizek, 1994:43; Gaum, 1997:1; Louw, 1992:363; Natale, 1995:23; Van Oostrum, 1995:2; Wikel, 1995:13). In the late 1980s, between 65% and 90% of parents said that they had reverted to home schooling for religious reasons (Mayberry, 1988:37).

In later years many parents expressed their belief that topics, such as evolution, sex education and moral relativism, were approached in a secular fashion at school, thereby suppressing alternative points of view and imposing on their conscientious scruples (Van Oostrum, 1995:3). Home schooling may counteract these problems because parents teaching their children at home

believe that it can help learners to receive a comprehensive learning programme according to their own norms and values (National Coalition of Home Schoolers in South Africa, 1996:3). Many parents feel that only by fulfilling their Christian obligation unconditionally they can ensure that their children are guided to discover the true meaning of life as perceived by parents as right (Louw, 1992:365).

In an interview a parent expressed his concern that his two eldest children who had matriculated at a public school were not bound by those moral values he regarded as important. He believed that they were too young to withstand the exposure to immorality they encountered at school. He did not wish his youngest children to be exposed to a similar situation and that was why they took refuge in home schooling as a possible solution to the problem (2003: Participant C).

- Maintenance of high academic standards

Since the mid 1970s and increasingly so during the 1980s educationists, such as Knowles (1989:8), raised concerns about the decline in the quality of public education. This decline could be attributed mainly to unstable economic conditions world-wide, forcing governments to cut their education budgets (Mayberry, 1988:37).

Academic standards were adversely affected when the numbers of learners increased disproportionately to the number of teachers, who then had to deal with larger classes (Brynard, 1998:189). The resultant decline in individual attention further contributed to parents' choice to educate their children at home. One participant reported as follows:

*"My children are in the primary school with such large classes that they do not feel comfortable to ask questions, so they come home and ask me the questions which they should ask the teachers"* (2003: Participant D).

In the USA the academic excellence of home learners has often been proved. On standardised tests most home learners achieve above the fiftieth percentile, while more than half of them achieve between the seventieth and eightieth percentile (Meighan, 1995:278; National Coalition of Home Schoolers, 1996:1).

In South Africa there are increasingly more doubts about the academic effects of the newly implemented Outcomes-Based Education system. To make matters worse statistical data have shown that the school results of Grade 10 learners, who had done Outcomes-Based Education up to Grade 9, were eight percentage points lower than in previous years with the old education system in all grades (Joubert, 2004:1).

There were also many doubts among parents about the national pass rate of Grade 12 learners in South Africa. Only 40% of the learners who were in Grade 10 in 2001 passed their Grade 12 examination in 2003, while only 58% of learners who were in Grade 12 in the beginning of 2003 passed the exam at the end of that year (Rademeyer, 2004b:1).

To counteract the latter, large numbers of parents in South Africa believed that individual exposure at home enabled learners to develop their abilities

and talents according to their unique pattern and tempo (2003: Participant D). This idea is supported by the research of Van Oostrum (1995:4) and substantiated by Rademeyer in her research (2004a:3) which shows home learners in Grade 4 to be 90.5% literate, in comparison with 48.1% of learners in public schools.

Participant D (2003) had strong feelings against the traditional school system. She felt that the traditional school system in South Africa allows parents no engagement in curriculum development, teaching methods or related matters, yet confronts them with compulsory school attendance between certain ages. This situation was already discussed by Van Oostrum (1995:4) ten years ago when he stated that the traditional school system in South Africa can be regarded as a transgression of the fundamental human rights of learners.

Although there are many parents who practice home schooling secretly, there are many known examples of excellence by means of home schooling. An outstanding example in South Africa is the home learner, Hannelie Hulsman, who completed her Grade 12 examination with five distinctions in 2001, when she was only 16 (Naudé, 2002:54). Participant F (2003) stated in her own words that "*it is possible for home scholars to do more than one grade in one year, which give [sic] these children more opportunities for development in all areas of their lives*". According to participant G (2004), parents of home schoolers in South Africa believed that their children had a better chance of achieving their full academic potential at home than at school, due to all the distractions in a classroom. She stated that

*"... when my daughter was in school she used to train for hours before and after school and she complained about the time wasted on administrative matters during the school day".*

Participant G's daughter had finished Grades 8 and 9 in one year, although her focus was on swimming and not only on academic achievements. According to the Chief Education Specialist (IRRISS), of the Free State Department of Education most registered home learners in South Africa, who wish to go to university in South Africa, follow a nationally accepted curriculum and they write examinations that are acknowledged by the South African Qualification Framework. These learners can then follow the normal procedures to apply to study at any university in South Africa. Home learners following their own curriculum may also be assessed by a private accredited assessor and then apply to study at any university in South Africa (2004: Participant A).

- The dissolution of family ties

Many parents and educationists regard societal disintegration as the indirect result of the dissolution of family ties (Van Oostrum, 1995:2), coupled with the fact that peer groups are often perceived as more influential than parents in the traditional school system (Whitehead & Crow, 1993:133). In home schooling, family ties are reinforced because learning occurs within the family context (National Coalition of Home Schoolers in South Africa, 1996:3). The negative influence of peer groups was often the reason why parents preferred

home schooling (Fidler, 1997). A contented, stable home life, far more than school, provides learners with the security and care they need to perform according to their abilities (Jeub, 1994:52). This was substantiated in an interview with Participant E (2004) who stated in her own words:

*"My daughter had the wrong friends, she used drugs and ignored me. We started home schooling, living in a caravan, touring the country. Within a few months we were best friends, her schoolwork improved and she stopped all her bad habits".*

- Financial considerations

The mother of two gifted children decided to educate all her children at home because she wanted to provide them with the best possible education, but could not afford the cost of private schooling. She also did not believe in the public school system (2003: Participant F).

Home schooling may be an affordable option for quality education for those parents who are disillusioned with the current public school system, but who cannot afford private schools (Van Oostrum, 1995:8). This does not mean however that home schooling is necessarily inexpensive because supplementary materials are rather expensive. Employing tutors, private lessons, extra-curricular activities, and other luxuries bring additional costs (Metts, 1996:72).

The possibility of public schools in South Africa becoming more expensive with less input from governing bodies could contribute to the existing negative perceptions of public schools. According to Kader Asmal, former Minister of Education, these learners will have to pay more for their tuition but the governing bodies will have less say in the matters related to their children's education (De Vries, 2004:1). Van Oostrum & Van Oostrum (1996:1) also added to this point stating that it was possible for parents, who had problems with the current school system and who could not afford private schooling, to consider home schooling to provide their children with high quality education.

### *Dealing with special needs*

Another reason for doing home schooling is the fact that average and slow learners can develop their own potential fully because of the individual attention they can get at home (Dahm, 1996:69; Whitehead & Crow, 1993:132). Learners with special needs can learn and develop at their own levels and are never compared to other learners, thus avoiding humiliation (Dahm, 1996:69). Likewise, learners with serious disabilities or certain illnesses can be accommodated in home schools (Cizek, 1994:44). The flexibility of home schooling also enables gifted learners to benefit fully from the advantages of not having a rigidly applied curriculum. Participant F (2003) said *"my children were very bored in the public school system, there seemed to be little time to stimulate the brighter learners"*.

- Social development

Another reason why parents wanted their children to do home schooling was

because they believed it could benefit their children's social development (Ray, 1992:13), although this aspect of home schooling is an important concern among the general public (Whitehead & Crow, 1993:133). The opponents of home schooling believe that interaction among learners is an important aspect of the formal schooling system that can never be addressed in home schooling. Parents of home learners, however, believe that the social security of the home fosters their children's social development (Mayberry *et al.*, 1995:2).

According to Lines (1996:66) research has not been able to prove or disprove any of the arguments above, neither have the advantages of socialising in either heterogeneous or homogeneous age groups been proved. It has also not been proved that home learners' social adjustment is so poor that it has a negative impact on the community. The contrary has however been shown, e.g. that home learners reveal fewer behavioural problems than learners in traditional schools. In fact, the frequent social maladjustment of the latter is often questioned (Durham, 1996:76).

Concern is often expressed that home learners are too isolated and cannot adjust to a heterogeneous society and they may be deprived of learning experiences and pleasant childhood memories. However the research of Knowles & Muchmore (1995:37-43) among adults who were home learners, shows that they believe themselves to have been adequately prepared for adulthood and they believe that positive socialising can also take place within the home school environment (Jeub, 1994:51). When necessary, home learners can participate in group activities by means of support group meetings (Metts, 1996:73) and in South Africa they are allowed to participate in public school activities (2004: Participant A). According to Participant L (2005) he was taught at home until he reached Grade 6 and then he entered the public school system. He said the following: "*I believe I was very well prepared for adulthood at home and I even became head boy of a large public school in Grade 12*".

- Nomadic patterns

According to participant H, parents who were involved with national or international concerns or occupations could participate in their children's education by doing home education (2004: Participant H). Children who competed in sporting activities internationally could also benefit from home schooling because of its flexibility (2004: Participant G). Participant G said "*since I started to do home schooling, I can swim in competitions overseas when I want to and I can catch up on my school work on my own*".

Therefore, there are numerous reasons why parents preferred home schooling. Personal circumstances largely determined the particular needs and problems surrounding the education of children. Often a combination of reasons influenced parents' decisions to educate their children at home.

Most parents who favoured home schooling did so because they were convinced that it was in their children's best interest. Some of their reasons may have been debatable and varied from parent to parent, but parents teaching their children at home were united in their conviction that home school-

ing not only solved the above problems with public schooling, but provided for all their children's educational needs.

#### *Home schooling: the down side*

Literature highlights the advantages and disadvantages of home schooling and these are confirmed in practice by the following summary of unstructured interviews. The statements made in interviews with South Africans largely corresponded with views held in the USA and other countries. An objective evaluation of home schooling becomes difficult when those who are best informed have few negative responses. Parents who practise home schooling focus mainly on the system's advantages. Participants I, J, and K (2004), two educationalists and one psychologist, shared the same view and their main concerns about home schooling are summarised here:

- Being exposed to peer group pressure helps learners to develop life skills and socialising with one's peer group should be possible without being influenced by peer group pressure.
- At school, learners become accustomed to and learn to handle their hierarchical position and its fluctuation; they learn to adapt to those younger and older than they are, as well as to groups.
- Their exposure to the variety in teaching styles, teachers, and forms of discipline and concepts of fairness prepares learners for similar situations in real life.
- Children learn to cope independently from their parents; they learn to be responsible for their own actions.
- Because learners are exposed to a variety of ideas, backgrounds and cultures they learn tolerance, formation of objective opinions and life skills such as compassion, empathy, understanding and gratitude. Home learners may be denied of these opportunities.
- The social isolation of home learners in their learning situation may have negative effects on their adult lives.
- Home learners are denied the academic competition of public schools, possibly depriving them of further motivation.
- The individual way, in which home learners' demands are handled, could deprive them of opportunities for sharing and coping with groups. They could grow up to be egocentric.
- Because home learners never compare their achievements with those of others, they could develop a distorted self-image.
- Parents could find it difficult to maintain a balance between their primary roles as educators and instructors.
- If parents implement home schooling for financial or personal gain, it could have a detrimental effect on their children.
- It might be difficult for parents to identify learning problems or learning disabilities as there are no peer learners for comparison.
- Children whose behaviour makes them unsuitable for attending public schools should be supported by psychotherapy. Home schooling will not make their behaviour socially more acceptable.

Although most parents refused to acknowledge the possible disadvantages of home schooling, there were those who were prepared to put their children back in main stream schools if it became a better option. Participant M (2005) said

*"my two older children wanted to go back to a main stream school because they were missing their friends, while my youngest son wanted to remain at home"*.

Another participant said *"I stopped doing home schooling because I had time for nothing else"* (2005: Participant N).

The above responses revealed widely differing perceptions of home schooling. To some, the aspect of socialising and the influence of peer group pressure was a disadvantage of home schooling, while others regarded it specifically as beneficial. Some educationalists were concerned about the amount of time and the influences that home schooling demanded of parents, while parents teaching their children at home regarded time spent with their children as an opportunity for bonding. Home schooling parents believe the advantages of teaching their children at home are more important than the disadvantages. Home schooling could therefore be seen as an open-learning system which could provide opportunities to those learners who wished to participate, irrespective of the possible disadvantages.

#### Home schooling: a possible model for a changed South Africa

Home schooling is regarded as a very open approach, but the degree of openness will depend on the way it is implemented. Parents with a teaching background tend to be more open in order to provide for their children's individual needs. Parents without any teaching background normally preferred a more structured, and hence less open, approach by relying more on ready-made subject-matter and teachers' guidance (2004: Participant A).

Since the mid 1980s legislation on home schooling in the USA has become less prescriptive, making parents keener to liaise more closely with public schools (Mayberry *et al.*, 1995:17). Although home learners' affiliation with public schools is not compulsory in the USA, educationalists believe that any type of contact between teachers and home learners benefits the latter. Schools can provide various voluntary support services, while parents retain control of their children's education (Dahm, 1996:68). Effective relations have therefore been established between home schools and education staff and authorities of public schools, bringing about and enabling mutual support and collaboration (Louw, 1992:369). Home schooling is therefore becoming increasingly important as an alternative to the provision of school education in the USA (De Waal, 2000:86).

In the American state of Iowa collaborative projects between public and home schools indicate the extent to which co-operation has already been established. Home learners are registered at a particular school and their education becomes a mutual operation between parents and the school. Parents can therefore educate their children at home, but remain part of the school community. After hours they utilise media centres, gymnasia, labora-

tories and other facilities, enabling home learners to participate in the cultural activities and sport the school offers. Where practical, they can participate in the enrichment classes for gifted learners. It is important that any collaboration remains voluntary for both public and home schools (Terpstra, 1994: 57-58).

According to Haigh (1995:4) meaningful collaboration between public and home schools is possible only if public schools are prepared to adopt a more flexible (open) approach in providing for all learners, including home learners. Certain schools in the USA are keen to collaborate with home schools, because they realise the advantages. Collaborative initiatives are at such an advanced stage that a support organisation has been established to act as an intermediary between public and home schools (Mayberry *et al.*, 1995:18)

In 1996 the SA Schools Act, promulgated by the Ministry of Education in South Africa, acknowledged parents' right to implement home schooling. This was an important turning point for parents who preferred to educate their children at home (RSA, 1996:18). Article 51 of the SA Schools Act stipulates that home schooling must meet the minimum requirements of the curriculum of public schools and that the standard must be equivalent to that of public schools (RSA, 1996:31). As the minimum requirements could not yet be determined, it is difficult to determine a policy on assessment.

According to De Waal (2000:163) the South African education system is in a transformation process with policies striving to establish a democratic educational system for the country. The Society for Home schooling in South Africa believes that a free, affordable system of private education (including home schooling) will offer so much competition that the quality of education in public schools will improve. According to the Society, home schooling could be pivotal not only to the freedom of all learners, but also to affordable quality education (Morgenrood, 1997:6).

In South Africa regulations determine that public schools have to support home learners if their infrastructure permits them to do so (Huysamer, 1998: 2). The schools concerned have nothing to lose, as their boards of control could prescribe the conditions for affiliation (Holtrop, 1996:76). In addition, such schools could benefit financially from any affiliation fees (Huysamer, 1998:2). Once schools experience the benefits of the incorporation of home learners, they could create even more structures to advise parents of home learners (Shaffer, 1989:34-35). The services offered by schools could be optional and could voluntarily be utilised by home learners or their parents.

## **Recommendations**

Home schooling can be a viable educational alternative because:

- Co-operation between the education authorities and home schoolers may be in the best interest of the individual's right to learn.
- A mutual willingness among parents and schools to work together more closely could enable home schools to utilise school facilities, while schools could gain financially.
- Formal education can learn from the concept of home schooling and a

symbiotic relationship between the two can benefit both.

There are various ways of establishing partnerships between home learners' parents and the boards of control of public schools. For example, home learners could affiliate with a school and utilise its curriculum, academic and extra-curricular facilities and services, or groups of home learners could be affiliated to a particular institution without utilising any of its services. Learners could also maintain contact with the base institution by post, telephone, or voluntary visits without utilising any of its services or facilities.

It is essential for all school systems to be directed towards preparing learners for a continuously changing world. South Africa which is experiencing an inevitable process of transformation should provide for a greater variety of learning systems. New teaching methods that meet the demands of our times and that allow stakeholders more freedom should be implemented. In other words, a new open learning education model should be implemented.

### Concluding remarks

It is clear that there are many demands on any educational system today. Parents tend to exercise their right of choice and an open learning system like home schooling may be a way of accommodating the needs of more learners. South Africa can learn from the experiences of home schoolers in the USA and an open approach with a mutual willingness among parents and schools to work together more closely may benefit all learners.

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#### Interviews

- Participant A: Chief Education Specialist (Institution and Research Registration and Independent School Subsidies) of the Department of Education in the Free State.
- Participant B: Chief Education Specialist (Special Needs in Education) of the Department of Education in the Free State.
- Participant C: Parent with 4 children, 2 of them are doing home schooling.
- Participant D: Parent with 3 children, all of them are doing home schooling.
- Participant E: Parent with one child who was on drugs but currently doing home schooling.
- Participant F: Parent with 4 children, 2 of them are of school-going age and are doing home schooling.
- Participant G: Parent of a learner who is training to become an Olympic swimmer.
- Participant H: Parent with one child and with a husband who is an engineer and does not work in one location for long.
- Participant I: Lecturer at a University.
- Participant J: Teacher at a Secondary School.
- Participant K: Child psychologists.
- Participant L: Adult who did home schooling until Grade 6 and then entered the public school system.
- Participant M: Parent of 3 children who all did home schooling for a period of time.
- Participant N: Parent of 3 children, the eldest did home schooling for a year.

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